

MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LONGFELLOW MEMORIAL FUND



By the deed of Mrs. Anne Longfellow Pierce, the sister of the poet Longfellow, the Maine Historical Society holds the title, and is now in possession of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house in Portland, the familiar colonial mansion, which dates from the period of the American Revolution, is associated with the revolutionary fame of General Peleg Wadsworth, the father of Longfellow's mother, and was the home of the poet himself during his childhood and early manhood and until he was appointed Professor in Bowdoin College. Here his first, and some of his later, literary work was done. To this house, still in the possession of his family, he was accustomed all his life to make an annual visit. His mind often reverted, with peculiar interest, to the scenes and surroundings of this early home.

From the deck of the steamer approaching our harbor, he wrote in his journal, "At sunrise I caught a glimpse of the fair city of my birth, rising beautifully in terraces above the sea,— the calm, solemn sea, that I have seen so often, and that Jean Paul longed to see once before he died. A glorious scene, with market boats rowing city-ward, rocks, promontories, light-houses, forts and wooded islands."

From its doors during his visits in Portland he writes of setting out on early morning walks, "through the streets of the beautiful town, as far as Bramhall's Hill, looking down upon Deering's Woods," or of strolling down town, meeting the familiar faces of people whom he knew when a boy, or to the old fort on Munjoy, "which, as a boy of seven, I helped to build by rolling stones down the hill," or to the foot of Elm street at sunset, to watch the "shadows of the opposite shore, deepened, on one edge, into the blacker hues of the woodlands and fields, and, on the other, softened into the silvery tints of the water" — or of driving to the beautiful promontory and heights north of the city, towards Falmouth, Stroudwater, Westbrook and Gorham.

It was here, in this home, he lingered by the bedside of his loved and honored father, and, when all was over and he was returning to Cambridge, the stones on the hillside in our Western Cemetery, gleaming white, seemed in the sensitiveness of his grief to wave to him his father's last adieu.

The old First Parish church, where he was accustomed to worship and whose pastor was his lifelong friend, still stands near by, just as when the young Longfellow left our city.

Mrs. Pierce's deed makes the Historical Society trustee, on certain terms, to hold the title and to keep the property in its present condition, as a memorial of the poet in all the future. Besides careful provisions to this end, the Historical Society is required to make its own permanent home upon the premises, to erect in the rear of the house a hall for its cabinet and library, and to remove them there within reasonable time, there to remain. The place of deposit for the Society's valuable collections, published and unpublished, must of course be in a building of fireproof construction.

At its annual meeting in June, 1901, the Historical Society decided to accept this generous gift, thereby engaging to fulfil the conditions of the deed. To meet them all in their full meaning and spirit, as the Society is now bound to do, a fund of from seventy-five to a hundred thousand dollars will be required.

The Historical Society was doubtless selected as trustee, in this instance, because of its interest in all that tends to illustrate the history of Maine, or to perpetuate the monuments of its past; — but it is not a moneyed institution and has no fund available for this purpose. Its acceptance of the gift and assumption of the obligation of the deed proceed upon the feeling that the rare munificence of Mrs. Pierce is not a thing to be refused; upon the belief, also, that an imperative public duty requires the preservation of property so rich in associations, memorable as they are imperishable, and that public regret, tending almost to indignation, would follow the destruction of it or its abandonment to business purposes. The Society confidently expects that, while it has not itself the resources required to meet the obligations it has undertaken, the citizens of Portland and of the State of Maine, natives of Maine who are now resident beyond its limits, many of whom have won wealth and honor abroad, and admirers everywhere of the most loved and most illustrious of American poets, will be glad to aid the Society in fulfilling its duty as trustee for the public under this deed from Mrs. Pierce; so that it may be able to hold in perpetuity, and to preserve from generation to generation, the home where the boyhood and youth of Longfellow dreamed and aspired, from which his footsteps set forth to the larger fields where his genius was to do its beautiful and beneficent work for the world, and to which they always fondly returned.

The charm of deep sensibility, of early and affectionate memory, as all the world knows, is in every line of Longfellow's letters and poems which touch upon this old home. The house remains as he remembered it in his boyhood, the atmosphere of the place full of recollections of him in that bright period when

. the boy's will was the wind's will
And the thoughts of youth were long, long thoughts,

when the lingering impression silently stole upon his mind of shadowy lines of trees,

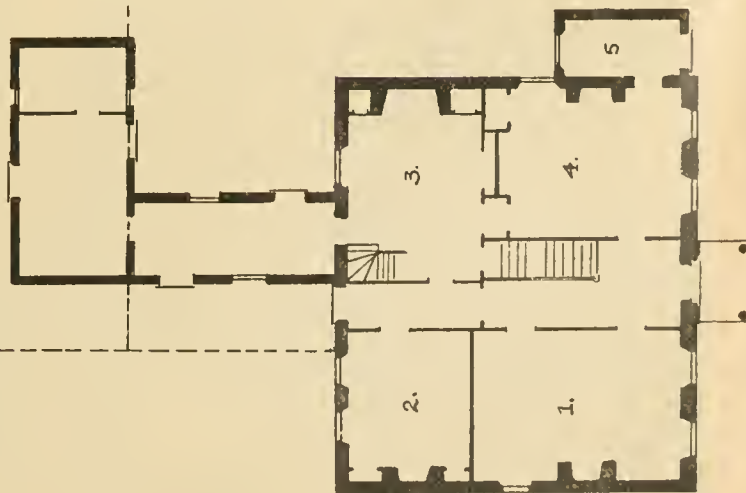


WADSWORTH-LONGFELLOW HOUSE.

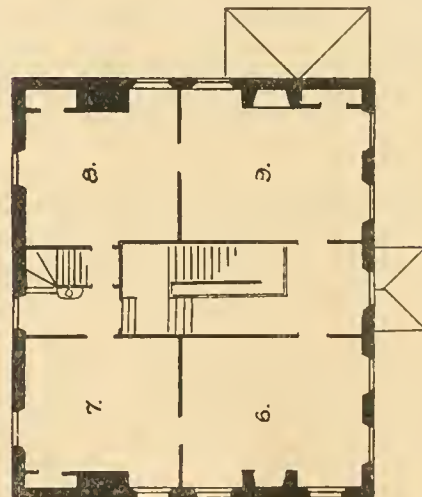
- No. 1. In this room, the largest in Portland, when the house was built, have been the social gatherings, the weddings, and the funerals of the Wadsworth and Longfellow families.
- No. 2. This room has been variously used; originally as a bedroom by Peleg Wadsworth and his wife, and later as a "den," or workroom by different members of the Longfellow family, and here on an old desk between the windows was written the poem of the "Rainy Day."
- No. 3. The kitchen, retaining now the old construction and appliances of the period.
- No. 4. Has been the principal living room for the house, except for a period when Stephen Longfellow had his law office here, and here came to him as students William Pitt Fessenden, George Pierce and many others.

- No. 5. This was built as an entrance or vestibule to Mr. Longfellow's office.
- No. 6. Was occupied as a chamber by many different members of the two families, but more particularly by Zilpah Longfellow, and was known as "Mother's room."
- No. 7. Was Mrs. Pierce's room.
- No. 8. Was known as the "back room."
- No. 9. As the "front room" or principal guest chamber of the house.
- No. 10. Room occupied by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as a young man, and which he always insisted upon occupying on his visits to Portland in after life.
- No. 12. Longfellow occupied at one time with two of his brothers, and here his earliest verses were written.
- No. 15. Miss Lucia Wadsworth occupied this room, the devoted maiden aunt who was a second mother to the Longfellow children of two generations.

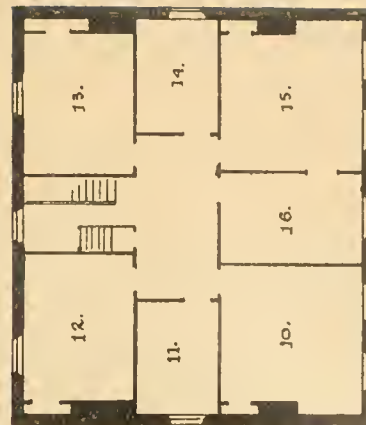
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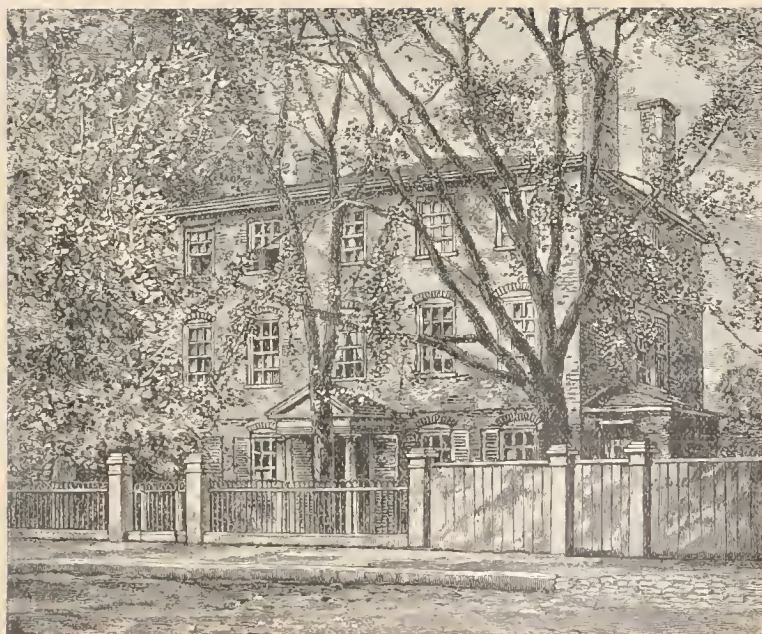
FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR



"The sheen of the far-surrounding seas,

* . * * * *

And the beauty and mystery of the ships,

And the magic of the sea."

Here are his own rooms, where visions, glimmering upon his thought at night, during laborious days were written out in sentences of "airy gold" by his patient hand; the windows, from which he and his distinguished brothers, when they were young, were accustomed to look out upon the mountains and the sea; the scene of the beautiful home life, of which his poetry is perhaps the tenderest and truest expression in all the range of our language, of fireside memories, which shine in many passages of his later works, the radiance of which was a subtle influence to mould his life and character to the beauty of his own ideals.

Years ago, when it was proposed to erect in Portland a statue of Longfellow, our Longfellow Statue Association said: "It would be a strange neglect of a beautiful and approved custom, both of ancient and of modern times, if the traveler, familiar with the poet's life and works, with the sculptures which preserve his face and figure and attest his fame and influence in other cities and lands, were to find, at his birthplace, no worthy memorial of him."

The response to this appeal was immediate. A noble statue of the poet now graces Longfellow Square.

The question is no longer one of erecting a monument to his memory, but of keeping intact for all coming time a monument already built, more intimately associated with his life and thought, more eloquent of him, than it would be possible now to construct of marble or of bronze.

Within the limits of our state, is there a memorial of the past, the loss of which would cause so universal regret, over the preservation of which so many family circles would rejoice?

The hearty co-operation of the entire community is earnestly solicited; — children, in the poetry of whose lives he so delighted to share, whose voices were to him as the sound of glancing waters in the desert, with love for whom his pages glow, men and women, who find in his writings something to heighten the joy of the happiest moments, as well as to mitigate the bitterness of life's recurring sorrows, all are invited. The place will be sacred to the lovers of Longfellow the world over.

While it is believed that those who can will give generously, the smallest contributions will be welcomed, and it is hoped that those, whose means are not equal to their will to help, will not be deterred from giving because others are in a position to contribute more largely than they.

The names of all who subscribe will be enrolled in a volume, to be always open to visitors at the Longfellow house.

Contributions may be sent to Fritz H. Jordan, Esquire, Treasurer, Portland, Maine. They will be at once directly acknowledged to those from whom they are received, and the fund will be kept wholly separate as "The Longfellow Memorial Fund of the Maine Historical Society," until applied to the use for which it is given.

The Maine Historical Society, by

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